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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether oral, silent, or choral reading would affect reading comprehension. Subjects were 22 heterogeneously grouped third grade students. Two groups of 11 subjects were assigned to each of the following three samples during a three week period: (1) oral reading; (2) silent reading; and (3) choral reading. To analyze results, percentages were calculated and a comparison was made indicating which method of reading would enhance comprehension. Results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference among the three methods' effect on reading comprehension. (Four tables of data are included and 30 references are attached.) (Author/SR)

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ORAL, CHORAL OR SILENT READING AND THEIR EFFECT ON READING COMPREHENSION

by

JOSEPHINE NARDELLA-RODRIGUEZ

Accepted
4/20/91

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Master of the Arts Degree
Kean College of New Jersey
May, 1991

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ASTRACT

This study was conducted to determine whether oral, silent or choral reading would effect comprehension. The twenty-two subjects used for this study were heterogeneously grouped third grade students. Two groups of eleven subjects were assigned to each of the following three samples during a three week period: 1) oral reading, 2) silent reading, and 3) choral reading. To analyze results, percentages were calculated and a comparison was made indicating which method of reading would enhance comprehension.

Results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the three samples and its effect on reading comprehension.

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There appears to be conflicting views with reference to the different methods of reading instruction and the valuable role they play in relation to comprehension.

As stated by researchers, oral reading is considered more difficult than silent reading. In order to be effective, oral reading requires correct pronunciation, proper enunciation, correct intonation, pitch, and fluent phrasing (Ross, 1986). Therefore if the student is preoccupied with the aforementioned then comprehension does not appear to be evident.

In the earlier years, reading orally affords the child the ability to sense the relationship between spoken and printed words. Taylor and Connor (1982), have stated that oral reading is a natural transition from speech to print for the child who is learning to read.

As stated by Ross (1986), choral reading is viewed as an effective strategy for helping children become acquainted with oral language patterns. Although choral reading avoids embarrassment for children who make mistakes and provides positive support for poor readers, there is no apparent indication of enhancing comprehension.

The advantages of silent reading become more apparent as the child enters third grade and beyond.

The demands of the classroom now require that the student use the text as a primary source of information. The need at this point in time to reinforce correct pronunciation, pitch, and tone diminishes. The reader must now be highly selective about the meaning behind the words in order to comprehend the content of the text.

Researchers have indicated that many teachers generally focus on oral reading versus any other method of reading instruction (Taylor, Conner 1982). When considering the beginning stages of a child's process to learn to read, oral reading does provide the natural transaction from speech to print (Guszak, 1978). It is quite apparent that oral reading should be encouraged until a child feels comfortable enough to move on to silent reading. When students are asked to read silently, it is quite normal for them to protest and indicate that they want to read aloud. This may occur since oral reading may well be the form of reading instruction they have been exposed to during the earlier years.

Research has also indicated that oral reading provides a definite social function. Proper enunciation and pronunciation of words were considered the mark of an educated person (Cheek and Cheek, 1980). Oral reading also provides the student with immediate

feedback in relation to success. Additionally, it also provides the student with positive self-esteem. The aforementioned is also important during the earlier stages of education.

As the student progresses through the higher grades, reading must be viewed as a means of understanding the subject matter. Thereby using it as a tool of comprehension in order to grasp the content of the subject matter presented. Consequently, science, history, psychology literature, etc., are not just printed words to be echoed but actual facts and information to be consumed, digested and stored for future use.

Choral reading can be an effective strategy for helping the child become acquainted with oral language patterns (Heinrich, 1976). It has been established among researchers that choral reading provides the child with an avenue to participate rather than waiting for their turn to read aloud. This procedure avoids embarrassment for poor readers as well as for those who make mistakes.

According to Scales (1980), the silent reading component of instruction allows the learner a private opportunity to interact with written material during an uninterrupted period of time and to present

understanding of the material through predetermined criteria in a predetermined manner.

Proficient silent reading is considered to have the advantages of being fast. The reader need not be concerned with the word by word oral translation of the text in order to grasp the meaning. The concentration level of the reader is more intense during silent reading than with choral or oral reading. There is virtually no outside stimuli with reading silently. The reader does not have to listen to various students reading aloud and is therefore not distracted by the different pitches and tones of others reading.

According to Smith (1978), those young readers who rely on the oral presentation of information to derive meaning are at a disadvantage. Since some students while listening must sound out or mumble the printed word in order to grasp the meaning, time is lost in trying to keep up with the oral reader.

According to a research report by Juel and Holmes (1980), there was evidence that readers decreased there processing time on difficult words in silent reading as compared to oral reading.

Hypothesis

To add to this body of evidence a study was established to determine the effectiveness of silent reading instruction on the development of comprehension

among third grade students as opposed to choral and oral reading methods of instructions.

It was hypothesized that comprehension achievement would not be different for any of the conditions, i.e., following silent, oral or choral reading when using third grade children.

PROCEDURE

The population selected for this study consisted of urban elementary age males and females located within the Union County school system of New Jersey. This urban school community consists of families within the middle to lower socioeconomic range.

The students for this study consisted of twenty two third graders functioning at an approximate second grade level as determined by their classroom teacher. Students from two classes were divided into two samples each of which were taught by certified teachers. Rotation of presentation of material was used to cancel effects of teacher difference or class difference, if any. The students involved in the study used the Economy Series basal reader entitles Spring Flight. The material was presented using three methods of reading instruction as shown in Table I.

TABLE I : PROCEDURE

	TEACHER 1	TEACHER 2
WEEK 1	silent choral oral	oral silent choral
WEEK 2	oral silent choral	silent choral oral
WEEK 3	oral silent choral	choral oral silent

These methods included; oral, silent and choral reading, followed by ten comprehension questions. The questions were answered independently in written form by the students. Each method of reading instruction was conducted three days per week over a three week span. Tabulation of scores for all three methods and for both classes, separately and together was made and *t* tests used to determine differences, if any, between the procedures.

RESULTS

The administration of the comprehension questions for oral versus choral reading revealed that there existed a mean score of 80.41 for oral sample and 79.66 for choral sample. Analysis of these numbers as indicated in Table II demonstrated a standard deviation of 9.88 for oral and 11.39 for choral.

TABLE II: ORAL VS CHORAL READING

	M	SD	t
ORAL	80.41	9.88	1.79
CHORAL	79.66	11.39	

NS = NOT SIGNIFICANT

In comparing the oral and choral reading treatments the scores indicated a difference in the standard deviation of 1.51, in favor of choral but only a mean difference of .75 in favor of oral. Thereby showing that no significant difference existed during the presentation of the material using the oral and choral methods of instruction.

The administration of the comprehension questions for oral versus silent reading revealed that there

existed a mean score of 80.41 for oral and 77.54 for silent. Analysis of these numbers as indicated in Table III demonstrated a standard deviation of 9.88 for oral and 9.76 for silent.

TABLE III: ORAL VS SILENT READING

	M	SD	t
ORAL	80.41	9.88	.97
SILENT	77.54	9.76	

NS = NOT SIGNIFICANT

In comparing oral with silent reading, the scores indicated a difference in the standard deviation of .12 in favor of oral and a mean difference of 2.87 in favor of oral. Consequently, although oral sample achieved a higher mean score, it does not necessarily imply that the oral reading method surpasses the silent reading method for comprehension since the t of .97 indicated no significant difference.

The administration of the comprehension questions for choral versus silent reading revealed that there existed a mean score of 74.71 for silent and 77.54 for choral. Analysis of these numbers as indicated in Table

IV demonstrated a standard deviation of 11.37 for silent and 9.77 for choral.

TABLE IV: SILENT VS CHORAL READING

	M	SD	t
SILENT	74.71	11.37	.88
CHORAL	77.54	9.77	

NS = NOT SIGNIFICANT

In comparing the choral and silent scores, a difference in the standard deviation of 1.60, in favor of the silent reading sample as shown. On the other hand there was a mean difference of 2.83 in favor of choral reading sample, thereby showing a slight but not significant difference using the choral method versus the silent method of instruction for comprehension.

A review of the data accumulated indicates that no apparent significant differences existed, favoring one particular method of reading instruction for achievement in comprehension.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In the analysis of the students t tests, the findings indicate that there is no significant

difference as a result of the different treatments among the three experimental samples.

The highest mean score was reached with the experimental sample of the oral reading method followed by comprehension questions as opposed to choral or silent reading. As an observer during the classroom experiment, it was noticed that this group preferred to read stories orally, followed by group discussions and completion of written comprehension questions. Since some of the students have difficulty reading and comprehending what they do read, they had a tendency to rely on their peers to grasp the main idea of the story. This method appeared to alleviate frustration levels for those who needed assistance. It also enabled all the students to share and discuss the stories. During oral reading, the pupils alternated and read a passage. Anyone who had difficulty with words was assisted by a peer (which provided a sense of accomplishment for all students involved).

Another observation made was that the choral reading activity was almost preferred as much as the oral reading procedure. In comparing the oral and choral reading methods, the scores indicated a mean difference of only .75. A possible explanation for the student preference would be that the students enjoyed reading together, therefore not singling out the slow

reader and enabling everyone to participate in class discussions. This permitted a chance for everyone to complete the comprehension questions with some knowledge of the story

However, it appeared that as the students read chorally, a few children could not keep up. Therefore they depended on their auditory skills to comprehend the main idea of the story.

Reading stories silently, followed by written comprehension questions was a difficult method for some students. This experiment focused on individual attention and required the student to answer questions they might not understand due to lack of reading skills. Those students who have difficulty reading could not depend on others to fill in the comprehension gaps. The mean score for silent reading was the lowest.

Although there appeared to be a similar range distribution among the scores, some students performed better in one area over another.

The null hypothesis that there would be no significant difference in comprehension between the samples was accepted since there was no statistically significant difference found.

Based on mean difference between the samples only, it would appear that the best approach would be to use oral reading to improve reading comprehension. However,

since there was no statistically significant evidence to support choral, oral, or silent reading and its effect on comprehension, further research should be done to provide more conclusive results.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Currently, the major objective in reading appears to stress comprehension rather than the fluent pronunciation of the written word. An ongoing controversy does exist as to whether silent reading produces better comprehension ability than oral reading. Comparative research according to Rowell (1976) has produced conflicting results.

According to Rowell there existed a tendency to gradually lean towards the use of silent reading and a phasing out of the amount of oral reading in the American schools. This changeover had more than likely brought about changing social conditions that stressed a need for efficient silent reading and as well by methods of testing and research based on silent reading.

Rowell conducted a study in an attempt to obtain objective proof concerning the relationship between comprehension and silent and oral reading. He utilized an individualized diagnostic instrument and as well took into consideration four factors: sex, grade level, socioeconomic background and population density of the school environments.

For the purpose of the study, Rowell used the Diagnostic Reading Scale by Spache with six Connecticut schools that matched criteria for suburban, rural and urban schools. Each school was representative of the higher as well as the lower socioeconomic level. Two

hundred forty boys and girls in the third and fifth grade were used.

The results of Rowell's study indicated that there was no significant difference found between silent and oral reading comprehension scores among students of varying levels of socioeconomic status.

Fuchs and Maxwell (1988) state in their study that the popular view prefers silent reading as the superior mode of reading comprehension. Their arguments imply that oral reading requires the designation of attention to pronunciation, intonation, and emphasis, which apparently hinders comprehension. In looking at the other side, there are arguments which support the potential superiority of oral reading. Collins (1961), suggests that oral reading forces students to fix their attention on the individual thereby opening the door to involve more senses which results in a more meaningful experience for readers.

There are those who contended that no difference exists between oral and silent reading based on the presupposition that comprehension depends on central rather than peripheral factors, according to Levin (1961).

Fuchs and Maxwell's (1988) study involved forty-four boys in grades 3-8 who participated in a special education program, specifically the population was

limited to the learning disabled student. The findings of the study indicated that oral reading enhances comprehension among poor readers by demanding additional attention to individual words as well as by involving more senses than silent reading.

Researchers have indicated that many teachers generally focus on oral reading versus any other method of reading instruction (Taylor, Conner 1982). When considering the beginning stages of a child's process to learn to read, oral reading does provide the natural transaction from speech to print (Guszak, 1978). It is quite apparent that oral reading should be encouraged until a child feels comfortable enough to move on to silent reading. When students are asked to read silently, it is quite normal for them to protest and indicate that they want to read aloud. This may occur since oral reading may well be the form of reading instruction they have been exposed to during the earlier years.

Research has also indicated that oral reading provides a definite social function. Proper enunciation and pronunciation of words were considered the mark of an educated person (Cheek and Cheek, 1980). Oral reading also provides the student with immediate feedback in relation to success. Additionally, it also provides the student with positive self-esteem. The

aforementioned is also important during the earlier stages of education.

As the student progresses through the higher grades, reading must be viewed as a means of understanding the subject matter. Thereby using it as a tool of comprehension in order to grasp the content of the subject matter presented. Consequently, science, history, psychology literature, etc., are not just printed words to be echoed but actual facts and information to be consumed, digested and stored for future use.

A quite legitimate viewpoint of oral versus silent reading has been discussed in Paul Burge's (1983) article. Burge believed that the controversy has existed in the professional field of reading for many years. He has commented that many professionals still nurture the idea that silent reading is superior to oral reading. As noted by Burge, other researchers have pointed out that the focus shouldn't be mainly on silent reading as a means of instruction, but a way in which the productiveness of oral reading instruction for the learner can be enhanced.

Furthermore when considering the adequacies or oral or silent reading, two fundamental factors of reading come into play; i.e., rate and level of comprehension. The rate of reading may very well be increased by either

method, but the important consideration here is that comprehension should not be sacrificed for speed.

In Burge's study, he examined the influence of oral reading and silent reading behavior on the reading rate and comprehension levels of the learner. His population for the study was comprised of eighteen fourth grade students from a public elementary school in central United States. Each student was administered six subtests of the Woods and Moe (1981) Analytical Reading Inventory. These subtests consisted of forms A and B, levels 2, 3, and 4.

The results of Burge's study exhibited a significant difference on all three levels with a higher comprehension rate for oral reading. Burge noted that his study demonstrated a need to consider oral reading in an additional role as a blueprint for comprehension. Rather than view silent reading superior to oral reading as a comprehension strategy, teachers of reading should assess the appropriateness of each and select which strategy works best to enhance a learners comprehension capacity.

One of the most common practices of reading, according to Lynch (1988), is also one of the most criticized by professional reading experts: round robin reading (For the purposes of this study, any references

to round robin reading will be considered the same as oral reading).

The participants of Lynch's experiment consisted of seventy-nine fifth grade students from three classrooms. The materials utilized in this experiment were passages with a reading comprehension test known as a sentence verification technique (SVT).

The results of this study found clear evidence that reading comprehension performance declines from listening to silent reading to oral reading. Several reasons were listed why comprehension may be more difficult during oral reading. First, reading comprehension during oral reading would require students to attend to varied oral reading styles of their peers. Some students may read softly while others may read with unusual points of emphasis. A second source of interference with comprehension may occur if students "read ahead" silently, thereby making the oral reading of their fellow student a noisy interference.

Teachers appear to have a very different belief about oral reading compared to that of several reading theorists. Numerous people have argued that oral reading is a poor reading technique states Durkin (1983) and Robertson (1974). Durkin stressed that the students who are silently "reading along" while another student reads in a monotone (at barely perceptible sound level)

may encourage subvocalization. Oral reading may also induce excessive eye regressions and fixation durations. According to Durkin, comprehension may be more difficult with oral reading and places an increased burden on the reader's memory. Durkin also states that oral reading may confuse students by leading them to believe that the purpose of reading aloud is to read "word by word" rather than to comprehend the meaning of the text.

Durkin and Robertson suggest that if oral reading is commonly conducted in the classrooms as it was in this study, the teachers cited by Hill (1983) may be greatly overestimating the comprehension occurring during oral reading. According to Hill, all of the teachers who used oral reading believed it assisted in the retention of the material read, and was a major instructional strategy for ninety- six percent of the teachers.

It has been discussed whether comprehension varies between oral reading and silent reading or listening conditions. The expectation was that reading comprehension would decline from listening, to silent, to oral reading conditions. According to Artley (1972), this order is based upon the assumption that listening to a text provides additional cues which are unavailable during silent reading. However, silent reading affords the formation of the cohesive meaning of the text

without the disruptions that are apparent in oral reading.

According to Mandak (1986), silent reading is seen as an effective means of comprehension. Oral reading is looked upon as a means of instructing and monitoring the progress of beginning readers. As stated by Newman (1978), silent reading has been favored since it provides more time to think about ideas, thereby making it more adaptable to difficult materials. More advanced silent reading do not have to specifically cover every word but can select more or less information as necessary.

In various earlier studies conducted by Swalm (1972), Burge (1983) and Rowell (1976), oral reading emerged as the better choice of comprehension involving low achievers and below average achievers.

As noted by Mandak (1986), silent reading needed to be carefully monitored since there is a tendency for students to possibly daydream or look elsewhere rather than read. Another important concern is that the teacher, especially during earlier years of reading development, will not be able to monitor the student decoding abilities. Also, the fact that students will finish at different times during silent reading, it may be difficult to manage the situation.

On a positive note, silent reading can be a solid base of comprehension if used effectively. According to Mandak (1986), a teacher can determine what level of understanding a student derives from a text by using a basal series which utilizes a page to page discussion format or a discussion after the entire reading selection. If a teacher offers a stable foundation of silent reading, such as a good knowledge of the related vocabulary, word decoding, and raising hands for assistance, then silent reading will be meaningful.

A research report conducted by Juel and Holmes (1980), established evidence that readers decreased there processing time on difficult words in silent reading as compared to oral reading.

According to Scales (1980), the silent reading component of instruction allows the learner a private opportunity to interact with written material during an uninterrupted period of time and to present understanding of the material through predetermined criteria in a predetermined manner.

Proficient silent reading is considered to have the advantages of being fast. The reader need not be concerned with the word by word oral translation of the text in order to grasp the meaning. The concentration level of the reader is more intense during silent reading than with choral or oral reading. There is

virtually no outside stimuli with reading silently. The reader does not have to listen to various students reading aloud and is therefore not distracted by the different pitches and tones of others reading.

According to Smith (1978), those young readers who rely on the oral presentation of information to derive meaning are at a disadvantage. Since some students while listening must sound out or mumble the printed word in order to grasp the meaning, time is lost in trying to keep up with the oral reader.

Choral reading as defined in Jeannette Miccinati's article (1985) is the listening to and responding to the prosodic feature in language. She considers this useful for teaching oral reading fluency. As noted Miccinati feels that children rely heavily on prosodic cues, such as, intonation, stress and duration in order to understand the syntactic structure of speech.

In agreement, Allington (1983) denotes that to suggest students read only with expression is not enough; they should be trained to identify prosodic features in language. Allington (1983) also indicates that there is support thru researchers that fluency training be used as a method of reading improvement. It is unfortunate that oral reading fluency is infrequently suggested as an instructional objective in teacher's manuals. Allington believes that since the lack of

fluency is indicative of poor readers, teachers need to integrate it into their reading instruction.

According to Kimmelman (1981) choral reading affords children an opportunity to hear as well as mimic their teacher's use of prosodic cues. Likewise, choral reading offers the student an opportunity to learn to enjoy listening and responding to sound, stress, duration and pitch. Kimmelman believes that once students become consciously aware of these prosodic signals, they as well will become aware of the predictable language patterns of syntax.

Chomsky (1976) reiterates that once a student can emulate their teacher's reading, they can start to transfer this ability to preparing a piece for choral reading on their own. This will enable them to listen to themselves and to others as they read and consequently try different interpretations of selections that they choose to read. As a result, interactive communication takes place. A student becomes a speaker as well as a listener.

Choral reading as observed by Chomsky (1976) involves a four step active listening process; that is, hearing, identification, interpretation and response. Therefore, since listening and reading compliment one another, a student's ability to comprehend the text will be augmented.

Additionally, choral reading can be an effective strategy for helping the child become aquainted with oral language patterns states Heinrich (1976). It has been established among researchers that choral reading provides the child with an avenue to participate rather than waiting for their turn to read aloud. This procedure avoids embarrassment for poor readers as well as for those who make mistakes.

Holmes and Allison (1985) have noted, in general, the most popular viewpoint among educational researchers and theorists is that classroom teachers should emphasize more silent reading and less oral reading. A search of the literature conducted by Holmes and Allison indicated that one of the foremost reasons for justifying silent reading is that it better facilitates comprehension than does oral reading.

Holmes and Allison have suggested that students in todays classrooms are literally exposed to strategies and assessments which involve comprehension and four different methods of reading. Oral reading consists of two different methods. One being when a student is reading orally to someone else, either in a small group or to the entire class. Quite often, as noted before, the reader may be more concerned about how they look and sound which then takes priority over reading for meaning. Another method occurs when students may read

aloud to themselves. This may occur when the student has encountered a difficult assignment and may resort to reading aloud. On a positive note, during this oral reading, a student may be occupied with meaning of the text rather than how they sound.

According to Holmes and Allison, the most common form of silent reading occurs when a student utilizes this method for study or recreational reading. This process involves no sound along with some lip movement. Although sometimes subvocalization may occur in younger students. Silent reading also occurs in conjunction with listening. Many classrooms are now equipped with reading materials which include cassette tapes enabling students to listen to the words as they read.

The purpose of this study conducted by Holmes and Allison, was to determine which of the four methods of reading (oral reading to an audience, oral reading to oneself, silent reading, silent reading while listening) best accommodates answering comprehension questions. Fortyeight students from three fifth grade classes in central Pennsylvania, participated in the study.
Four passages of approximately six hundred words were selected from a science textbook (Barufaldi, Ladd, and Moses 1981) written for fifth grade students.

The results indicated that students had higher scores in the oral reading to oneself and silent reading

than in the silent reading while listening method. There were no significant differences found between oral reading to oneself and silent reading or between the two oral reading methods.

Apparently the results have suggested that for the most part, the fifth graders exhibited better comprehension when they read orally to themselves or read silently. Holmes and Allison noted that when students read orally to someone else, their capacity to answer higher level questions seemed to be impeded. Once more, the students may be concerned about how they sound or appear to others. On the other hand, oral reading to an audience has one additional element that the other methods do not; that is, close monitoring of the reading by the teacher.

As noted in additional studies by Guthrie and Tyler (1976) and as well by Juel and Holmes (1981), it has been suggested that poor readers perform differently while reading orally and silently, mainly because they are not completely decoding during silent reading. Decoding becomes an important part of comprehension when reading for informational purposes.

Holmes and Allison indicated that although neither silent nor oral reading best facilitates comprehension, social interaction factors or reading aloud to a peer

group, may be a significant consideration for future researchers.

In summation, it appears that researchers have not established any conclusive evidence as to which method of reading enhances comprehension.

While oral reading may be beneficial to those students who cannot read fluently, with correct intonation, pitch, etc.

Each method of reading is advantageous at different stages in a student's education. Also combinations of different methods can augment comprehension. For example, a teacher may wish to present a story by first using choral reading, then have the students read silently and answer the questions.

Rather than view one method superior to another, teachers may wish to assess each method for its valid appropriateness and utilize it when the need arises.

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